

peppermint flour by brawlite

Series: lattes and love songs [1]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Coffee Shops & Cafés, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Billy Hargrove Tries to Be a Better Person, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Food, M/M, Mutual Pining, Pining, Unresolved Romantic Tension, a small christmas thing, billy is still working out his sexuality, billy just wants to do something nice for steve, but is full of second guesses, look i just have a lot of feelings about this universe and these boys, pure fluff, some very loosely discussed food issues on billy's part, steve harrington owns a coffee shop

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Summary:

Billy makes Steve Christmas cookies. They're not perfect, which sucks, because everything Steve does is perfection. It's hard to measure up.

peppermint flour

Author's Note:

- For [ToAStranger](#).

this is from a little universe [toastranger](#) and i have been talking about, loosely called "lattes and love songs are for losers." here are some brief facts you need to know:

- modern au
- preppy hipster steve, 80's lover billy
- steve owns and runs a coffee shop
- billy goes into the coffee shop every day, pretty much just to see steve
- of course, billy is adamant that he doesn't have a crush, despite what max says

Peppermint burns in his nostrils like the first freezing gust of a winter storm. It crunches and splinters, breaking apart underneath the glass that Billy's slamming against helpless candy-canes trapped under parchment paper.

"There's gotta be an easier way to do that," Max says, face scrunched up in judgement.

"Shove it," Billy tells her, and continues wailing on the peppermint sticks with the bottom of the glass jar, crushing them into as many tiny pieces as possible.

"You're getting it *everywhere*, Billy," Max says, watching tiny shards of candy-cane fall onto the counter, onto the ground, even onto Billy's clothes. The destruction is not at all contained, nor is it all that productive. Max is right: there's probably an easier way to do it, but Billy isn't sure what exactly that is, so he's just going to town on the sticks with the jar, trying to crush them into as many tiny pieces as possible.

The recipe had suggested he use a mortar and pestle, but he doesn't have anything that fancy.

"The recipe says '*peppermint flour*,'" he says, teeth clenched in annoyed-concentration. "Candy-canes, finely crushed. I need a half cup of this shit."

"Oh my god," Max says, making a grab for the jar. "Give me that."

Billy yields, letting her make the rest of the *candy-cane flour* while he preps the rest of the sugar-cookie recipe. He lets her win because it's annoying and tedious and she's offering: not because he can't do it himself. He just doesn't deal with frustration well, okay?

The whole thing is just as stupid as it is dumb, but Billy decided days ago that he was going to make these idiotic cookies because -- well, just because, really. And now he's fucking wedded to the idea like a promise to himself, stubbornly unable to give it up no matter how complicated they are or how bad at baking he is.

"You could just give him a card, or something," Max suggests. "Or corner him under some mistletoe."

"Max," Billy snaps. "*It's not like that*. I'm just making him cookies."

Cookies are always much easier when Billy makes them with Steve. Sometimes he follows Steve around the kitchen of the coffee shop and helps out when Steve's all alone and Billy doesn't have to work. Baking is fun, when he does it with Steve. Alone, it makes him want to throw plates.

"Uh huh," Max says, meticulously crushing up the peppermint sticks far better than Billy had been. She is patient and careful, gathering the resulting flour into a measuring cup once she deems it of a satisfactory consistency. "Because you're such good friends, huh?"

"We are," Billy insists. "We're just *just* friends. And he's been so fucking generous and shit to me -- I owe him some cookies."

"*I think you owe him more than cookies*," Max mumbles under her breath.

She sets the half-cup measuring cup on the counter next to him, and Billy mixes the shit into his ingredients with a scowl. Teenagers -- they think they know *everything*. He can't really complain, because

for as bad as Max can be, Billy was a hundred times worse as a teen. He's just grateful he doesn't have to deal with his teenage self walking around every day of the week. That was a hassle for everyone involved -- including Billy himself.

But the truth is this: Billy *does* owe Steve more than a batch of poorly-made and badly-executed Christmas cookies. Steve has done *so much* for him during the time Billy has known him -- including and up to, most recently, taking care of Billy while he was feverish and sick and delusional -- and also, maybe, a little too handsy for his own good.

It's not *really* Billy's fault that all he wanted to do while running hot and feeling dizzy was to curl up against Steve and cuddle against his ugly cashmere. It's not *really* his fault that he woke up tangled up with Steve and then spent way too long watching Steve's face all soft with sleep. It's not *really* Billy's fault that he freaked out about all of that moments later, either.

It had just been so close, so personal -- and so tremendously *overwhelming* -- that Billy hadn't known what to do with it at all.

So, maybe he'd freaked a little bit and let the clawing, tearing anxiety get to him.

And maybe he still feels bad about that, too. Steve had gotten the brunt of his standoffishness, his inability to deal with anything.

So: cookies.

Yeah, that's it.

The cookies -- well the cookies could have come out worse. They're a little brown around the edges, but when Max tries one, she doesn't make that face she pulls when she really hates something, so Billy counts it as a win. They're fine, he decides, after trying one fresh out of the oven. They'd be better if he'd baked them properly, for a little less time, but at least he didn't burn the absolute living shit about them. Sure, Steve would make them a hundred times better, but Billy's not a baker, nor is he patient, and it's the thought that counts, right?

Well -- hopefully Steve'll like 'em anyway.

--

Billy keeps the cookies hidden behind his back when he goes in to the coffee shop.

So far, other than the couple of days he was out of his mind and feverish, Billy hasn't missed a goddamn day since he found the place. He hasn't missed a day of making fun of Steve for his wardrobe, hasn't missed a day of seeing Steve work his magic behind the bar, hasn't missed a day of Steve calling him some absurd name instead of just *Billy*.

Yesterday, Billy had been *Van Halen*. The day before, he'd been *One of the Lost Boys*. The day before that, *Bon Jovi* -- which Billy found a bit uncharitable, but still hilarious.

"Open on Christmas, huh?" Billy asks, spotting Steve behind the counter. Like he didn't know they'd be open, like he didn't fucking plan this.

"Yep. I let everyone else have the day off, though."

"Yeah, you're a real saint, pretty boy" Billy says. He leans on the counter, one hand braced on the cool marble, and gives Steve his best charming smile. "Americano. Black. Extra strong."

Billy pays, slipping a hard-earned twenty into the tip jar, and then slides over to the end of the bar to watch Steve work. Today, he's wearing another one of his horrendously ugly-but-fashionable sweaters. This one is baby blue and makes Steve look way too soft, way too touchable. *Cashmere*, Billy figures, because Steve is just that much of a preppy fucking asshole. Billy's been curled up against those shoulders once before -- that time he was sick -- he knows how fucking soft those sweaters are.

With a jolt, Billy tears his eyes away and slides the plate of cookies onto the bartop. Max had put a giant red bow on top of the saran wrap. *To make it look less fucked up*, she'd said.

Billy looks at the malformed, browned cookies, eyes drifting to the

perfect pastries Steve baked in the pastry cabinet, and is instantly consumed with the acidic bite of regret. *Fuck*. He shouldn't have done this, shouldn't have brought something so *stupid*. It's not like Steve needs the cookies. It's not like he couldn't have made *better* cookies himself.

He doesn't need Billy fucking Hargrove bringing him burnt-to-shit sugar cookies and pretending like it makes a good gift.

But a month or so ago, Steve had mentioned how much he loved candy-canes in passing, while chomping down on one, and Billy had been obsessing over it ever since. He saw the recipe on some random webpage -- and that was it. He *knew* he had to make them for Steve for Christmas.

Now -- it just seems so dumb.

Billy wants to swipe them off the counter and send them crashing onto the floor. He wants to hide them from Steve's judgy eyes, wants to have never brought them here in the first place.

But he's too late. Steve is already putting Billy's Americano down next to the plate, looking down at the bow-topped gift with careful curiosity.

"What's this?" Steve asks.

"It's nothing." Billy's fingers twitch at his side -- he has half a mind to grab the plate and pull it back, pretend it was all a joke. Not something meant for Steve at all.

Steve's eyes scrunch a little at the corners as he peers down at the cookies. He always does that when he thinks. "Are these...for me?" he finally says, quieter than normal.

Billy finds himself nodding, pushing the cookies an inch closer to Steve with two nonchalant fingers on the plate. His fingers catch against the saran wrap. "Yep," he says reluctantly, aiming for apathetic. "Merry Christmas and all that jazz."

Steve's face does something weird. Billy's not entirely sure what to call it, but Steve clenches his jaw and his eyes go dark. His lips

twitch, purse, and then eventually turn up into a careful smile. “Did you *make* these?”

“Well, if I’d bought them, they wouldn’t look like such shit.”

“They look good,” Steve says, already taking the saran wrap off the plate to fish out a cookie.

“You’re not obligated to eat them, you know. They’re just --” Just *what?* Billy thinks to himself. He doesn’t know what they are, other than something he couldn’t stop obsessing about making for Steve for Christmas.

They’re just stupid peppermint flour and sugar and butter, burnt and misshapen and made halfway presentable under a dumb bow.

Steve doesn’t ask him what they’re *just*. He just takes a cookie without hesitation and eats it.

Billy watches as Steve’s teeth sink into the sugar cookie, watches as he closes his lips and chews with certainty. He watches as Steve’s mouth quirk up into a full fucking grin and Billy’s stomach twists in something that feels a lot like hopeful delight.

“Billy,” Steve says, swallowing. His throat works and shadows catch his adam’s apple as it bobs with the motion. “Billy, these are *good*.”

“They’re burnt to shit, pretty boy.” Steve doesn’t have to pretend to like them. Not for Billy’s benefit.

“If they were *burnt to shit*, they’d be black. They’re not. They’re just a little brown around the edges.” Steve takes another couple out and hands one to Billy. Steve starts in on his second, eating this one a bit slower. “They look like you only left them in for a minute or two too long. They’re still *good*.”

Billy just shrugs and takes the cookie Steve is offering him. When he tries it, it tastes better than the one he tried fresh out of the oven. Like, for whatever reason, it tastes better from Steve’s hand.

Billy has no fucking idea what to do with that information.

“Was this your first batch?” Steve asks.

“Yeah,” Billy says. “Max helped.”

“Well then these are fucking awesome for your first batch.”

Heat twists up in Billy’s gut at the praise, molten and coiling. It makes him feel insatiably hungry, so he wolfs down the rest of the cookie, if only for something to do with his tongue. When he’s finished, he licks the sugar from his lips and watches Steve eat another cookie.

“They’ve got nothing on your cookies.”

“Yeah, well,” Steve grins back at him while Billy’s heart struggles in his ribcage. “I do actually do this for a living, you know.”

Billy wrinkles his nose. “You caffeinate strangers for a living,” he says, finally helping himself to the coffee Steve made him. “Making them fat is secondary. A hobby.” For the last few months, Steve has been plying Billy with decadent pastries and sweets, making it harder for Billy to keep up his *hot bod*. He always gives them to Billy under some guise of *testing a recipe* or some other bullshit, but Billy knows Steve just wants him nefariously spend more time at the gym.

“Uh huh. Because you’ve gotten *so fat*.” Steve’s eyes rake over Billy’s torso, or what he can see of it. A lot of people check Billy out on a daily basis and he loves it, he fucking *eats it up*. Steve checking him out, even as a joke? It makes Billy decidedly nervous. It makes his gut feel tight and twisted and full of swarming wasps.

“I fucking love candy canes. How did you know?” Steve asks, plowing ahead like Billy isn’t shifting on his feet and feeling decidedly off-balance. “Did I tell you that?”

“Lucky guess,” Billy says, like he doesn’t remember a conversation they had over a month ago, especially when they see each other every day. Like he didn’t obsess over this. Like he didn’t freak out over it enough to nearly run out of the shop, plate of cookies in hand, because they weren’t good enough.

Steve smiles. It’s not one of those sarcastic grins he uses when they’re

making fun of each other, or one of his mirthful grins when Billy's managed to shock him into a laugh. It's just -- a smile. Genuine and soft and full of warmth.

"I love them," Steve says. "Thank you."

"Anytime," Billy says, and then bites his lip in a frown. "Actually, no. Scratch that. I almost trashed my apartment trying to make these. I'll stick to helping you in the kitchen here, and that's it."

Steve laughs, merry and fucking bright. "God, I'm sorry I missed that. I'll have to ask Max about it."

"No, you won't." God, if Max gives up his secrets, Billy is gonna kill her. Unless he dies of mortification, first.

"I'll tell you what," Steve says, surveying the shop with his hands on his hips. "You're the only person who's come by so far today. How about I make us some coffee to go with these cookies, toss the closed sign on the door, and we can sit by the window and you can tell me all about your baking adventures."

It sounds like a decent enough way to spend an afternoon on Christmas, Billy thinks.

This morning, he celebrated with Max, drinking cocoa and eating pancakes by their tiny tree. Later, he'll have to go into work at the bar and watch everyone get shit faced after long days with their extended families -- but right now? Right now, he couldn't think of a better way to spend his time than in Steve's coffee shop, sitting with his knees brushing up against Steve's, eating Billy's not-quite-perfect-cookies and drinking Steve's always-perfect coffee with way too much cream.

Author's Note:

if you're interested in these cookies, [the recipe](#) can be found here. they're my favorite holiday cookies to make.

you can find me on [tumblr](#), if you are so inclined.

Works inspired by this one:

- [linger](#) by [ToAStranger](#)